

ILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

CHAPTER XXIII.

-13-Holt Frees His Mind.

Macdonald whirled in his tracks. Old Gid Holt was leaning on his elbow with his head out of the window. "You better come and beat me up first, Mac," he jeered. "I'm all stove up with a busted laig, so you can wallop me good. I'd come out there, but I'm too crippled to move."

"You're not too crippled to go back to Kusiak with me. If you can't walk, you'll ride. But back you go."

"Fine. I been worrying about how to get there. It's right good of you to bring one of these here taxis for me, as the old sayin' is."

"Where have you cached the gold you stole?"

"I ain't seen the latest papers, Mac. What is this stuff about robbin' a bank and shootin' Milton?"

"You're under arrest for robbery and murder." "Am I? Unload the particulars.

When did I do it all?" "You know when. Just before you

left town." Holt shook his head slowly. "No,

sir. I can't seem to remember it. Sure it ain't some one else you're thinking about? Howcome you to fix on me as one of the bold, bad bandits?" "Because you had not sense enough

to cover your tracks. You might just as well have left a note saying you did it. First, you come to town and buy one of the fastest dog teams in Alaska. Why?"

"That's an easy one. I bought that team to win the Alaska sweepstakes from you, And I'm goin' to do it. The team wasn't handled right or it would have won last time. I got to mullin' it over and figured that old Gid Holt was the dog puncher that could land those huskles in front. See?"

"You bought it to make your getaway after the robbery," retorted Macdonald.

"It's a difference of opinion makes horse races. What else have you got against us?"

"We found in your room one of the sacks that had held the gold you took from the bank."

"That's right. I took it from the But you didn't find any sack I took kind. when your bank was robbed-if it was robbed," added the old man significantly.

"Of course, I knew you would have an alibi. Have you got one to explain why you left town so suddenly the night the bank was robbed? Milton was killed after midnight. Before ward. But the salt that had lent a morning you and your friend Elliot routed out Ackroyd and bought a lot | though he won, he lost, For Sheba had of supplies from him for a hurry-up trip. You slipped around to the corral and hit the trall right into the blizzard. Will you tell me why you were in such a hurry to get away, if it wasn't to escape from the town where you had murdered a decent old fellow who never had harmed a soul?"

"Sure I'll tell you." The black eyes of the little man snapped eagerly. "I came so p. d. q. because that side pardner of mine Gordon Elllot wouldn't let me wait till mornin'. He had a reason . for leavin' town that wouldn't walt a minute, one big enough to drive him right into the heart of the blizzard. Me, I tagged along."

"I can guess his reason," jeered the Scotsman. "But I'd like to hear you put a name to it."

Holt grinned muliciously and waved a hand toward the girl who was pillowing the head of her lover. "The name of his reason is Sheba O'Nelll, but it's to be Sheba Elliot soon, looks like."

"You mean-The little miner took the words triumphantly out of his mouth. He leaned forward and threw them into the face of the man he hated. "I mean that while you was dancin' and philanderin' with other women, Gordon Eillot was buckin' a blizzard to save the life of the girl you both claimed to love. He was mushin' into fifty miles of frozen hell while you was fillin' up with potted grouse and champagne. Simultaneous with the lame goose and the monkey singlestep you was doin', this lad was windjammin' through white drifts. He beat you at your own game, man. You're a bear for the outdoor stuff, they tell me. You chew up a blizzard for breakfast and throttle a pack of wolves to work up an appetite for dinner. It's your spe- He hated the man who had robbed him cialty. All right. Take your hat off of Shebs, but he could not escape reto that chechacke who has just whaled specting him. Ellist had fought until you blind. He has outgamed you, Col- he had been hammered down into unby Macdonald. You don't run in his consciousness and he had crawled to class. I see he is holding his haid up his feet and stood erect with the smile again. Give him another half-hour and he'll be ready to go to the mat with

you again." The big Alaskan pushed away a fear that had been lingering in his mind ever since he had stumbled on that body buried in the snow yesterday afterso hurriedly? He would not let him

self believe it. "You ought to work up a better story than that," he said contemptuously. "You can throw a husky through the holes in it. How could Elliot know, for instance, that Miss O'Neill was not safe?"

"The same way you could a' known it," snapped old Gideon. "He phoned to Smith's Crossin' and found the stage hadn't got in and that there was a whale of a storm up in the hills."

Macdonald set his face. "You're ying to me. You stumbled over the stage while you were making your getaway. Now you're playing it for an alibi."

Elliot had risen. Sheba stood beside him, her hand in his. She spoke quietly. "It's the truth. Believe it or not as you please. We care nothing about

The stab of her eyes, the carriage of the slim, pliant figure with its suggestion of fine gallantry, challenged her former lover to do his worst.

On the battered face of Gordon was a smile. So long as his Irish sweetheart stood by him he did not care if he were charged with high treason. It was worth all it cost to feel the warmth of her brave, impulsive trust.

The deep-set eyes of Macdonald clinched with those of his rival. "You cached the rest of the gold, I suppose," he said doggedly.

With a lilt of his shoulders the younger man answered lightly: "There are none so blind as those who will not see, Mr. Macdonald." He turned to Sheba. "Come. We must make breakfast."

"You're going to Kusiak with me," his enemy said bluntly.

"After we have eaten, Mr. Macdonald," returned Elliot with an ironic "Perhaps, If you have not had breakfast yet, you will join us."

"We start in half an hour," announced the mine-owner curtly, and he turned on his heel.

The rifle lay where Sheba had dropped it when she ran to gather her stricken lover into her arms. Macdonald picked it up and strode over the brow of the hill without a backward look. He was too proud to stay and watch them. It was impossible to esbank in the afternoon, where I had had cape him in the deep snow that filled bought. Milton's books will show that. they would attempt nothing of the

The Scotsman felt for the first time in his life old and spent. Under tremendous difficulty he had mushed for two days and had at last run his men down. The lust of vengeance had sat on his shoulders every mile of the way and had driven him feverishly forsavor to his passion was gone. Even gone over to the enemy.

With the fierce willfulness of his temperament he tried to tread under foot his doubts about the guilt of Holt and Elliot. Success had made him arrogant and he was not a good loser.



Sheba Had Gone Over to the Enemy.

of the unconquered on his lips. Was this the sort of man to murder in cold blood a kindly old gentleman who had never harmed him?

The only answer Macdonald found was that Milton had taken him and his partner by surprise. They had friend Holt are great little explainers." noon. Was his enemy going to escape been driven to shoot the cashler to In spite of his bitterness Sheha felt tears on Colby Macdonald. Don't The arrival of Elliot interrupted contain, after all? Could Holt be telling cover up their crime. Perhaps Holt or a change in him. She seemed to fancy any story-book foolishness about fidences. He had come, he said, to re-

neart of the Scotsman was bitter within him. He intended to see that nis enemies paid to the last ounce. He would hurry them to the gallows if noney and influence could do it.

None the less, his doubts persisted. If they had planned the bank robbery, why did they wait so long to buy supplies for their escape? Why had they not taken the river instead of the bill trail? The story that his enemies told hung together. It had the ring of truth. The facts supported it.

One piece of evidence in their favor Macdonald alone knew. It lay buried n the deep snows of the hills. He shut his strong teeth in the firm resolve that it should stay there.

. The weather had moderated a good deal, but the trail was a protected forest one. The two teams now going down had come up, so that the path was packed fairly hard and smooth. Holt lay propped on his own sled against the sleeping-bags. Sheba mushed behind Gordon. She chatted with them both, but ignored entirely the existence of Macdonald, who followed with his prize-winning Siberlan

Though she tried not to let her lover mow it, Sheba was troubled at heart. Gordon was practically the prisoner of a man who hated him bitterly, who believed him guilty of murder, and who would go through fire to bring punishment home to him. She knew the power of Macdonald. With the money back of him, he had for two years fought against and almost prevailed over a strong public opinion in the United States. He was as masterful in his hatred as in his love. The dominant, fighting figure in the Northwest, he trod his sturdy way through opposition like a Colossus.

Nor did she any longer have any illusions about him. He could be both ruthless and unscrupulous when it suited his purpose. As the day wore toward noon, her spirits drooped. She was tired physically, and this reacted upon her courage.

The warmer weather was spolling the trail. It became so soft and mushy that though snowshoes were needed, they could not be worn on account of the heavy snow which clung to them every time a foot was lifted. They wore mukluks, but Sheba was wet to the knees. The spring had gone from her step. Her shoulders began to sag.

For some time Gordon's eye had been seeking a good place for a day camp. He found it in a bit of open timber above the trail, and without a word he swung his team from the path.

"Where are you going?" demanded Macdonald.

"Going to rest for an hour," was Elliot's curt answer. Macdonald's jaw clamped. He strone orward through the snow beside the

trail. "We'll see about that." The younger man faced him angrily. "Can't you see she is done, man? There is not another mile of travel in her until she has rested."

The hard, gray eyes of the Alaskan the bank." took in the slender, weary figure leanit on deposit, to pay for the team I the hill trails, and he was convinced ing against the sled. On a soft and ba, almost in a whisper. She was tremmushy trail like this, where every footstep punched a hole in the loose snow, the dogs could not traved with any extra weight. A few miles farther down they would come to a main-trayeled road and the going would be better. But till then she must walk. Macdonald gave way with a gesture of his hand and turned on his heel.

At the campfire Sheba dried her mukluks, stockings, caribou mitts and short skirts. Too tired to eat, she forced herself to swallow a few bites and drank eagerly some tea. Gordon had brought blankets from the sled and he persuaded her to lie down for a few minutes.

YYou'll call me soon if I should sleep," she said drowsily, and her eyes were closed almost before the words were off her lips.

When Macdonald came to order the start half an hour later, she was still asleep. "Give her another thirty minutes," he said gruffly.

Youth is resilient, Sheba awoke rested and ready for work. While Gordon was untangling the dogs she was left alone for a minute

The hungry look in his eyes touched her. Impulsively she held out her

with the mine-owner.

"You're going to be fair, aren't you, Mr. Macdonald? Because you-don't like him-you won't-?"

He looked straight into the dark. appealing eyes. "I'm going to be fair to Robert Milton," he told her narshly. "I'm going to see his murderers hanged if it costs me every dellar I have in the world."

"None of us objects to justice," she told him proudly. "Gordon has nothing to fear if only the truth is told." "Then why come to me?" he de-

She hesitated; then with a wistful heart. "I'm afraid you won't do jus- armor?" tice to yourself. You're good-and and clean and just." .

against Elliot?" he asked fronically. "For yours and for his, too. You

traitor to himself. And Gordon Elliot take him on his own ground. isn't that. He couldn't do such a thing as this with which you charge him. It is not in his nature. He can explain everything."

"I don't doubt that. He and his the true reason why they had left town another had fired the actual shots, but have a glimpee of his turbid soul en- mouther his life. That may be true of ceive congratulations,

Elliot was none the less guilty. The gaged in battle. He turned away with- halfling boys, maybe, but a man goes out shaking hands, but it struck her that he was not implacable.

While they were at luncheon half a dozen packmules laden with supplies for a telephone construction line outfit had passed. Their small, sharp-shod hoofs had punched sink-holes in the trail at every step. Instead of a smooth bottom the dogs found a slushy bog cut to pieces.

At the end of an hour of wallowing Macdonald called a halt.

"There is a cutoff just below here, It will save us nearly two miles, but we'll have to break trail. Swing to the right just below the big willow," he told Elliot. "I'll join you presently and relieve you on the job. But first Miss O'Neill and I are going for a little side trip."

·All three of them looked at him in sharp surprise. Gordon opened his lips to answer and closed them again without speaking. Sheba had flashed

a warning to him. "I hope this trip isn't very far off the trail," she said quietly. "I'm just

a wee bit tired." "It's not far," the mine-owner said curtly.

He was busy unpacking his sled. Presently he found the dog moccasins for which he had been looking, repacked his sled, and fitted the shoes to the bleeding feet of the team leader. Elliot, suspicious and uncertain what to do, watched him at work, but at a signal from Sheba turned reluctantly away and drove down to the

Macdonald turned his dogs out of the trail and followed a little ridge for perhaps a quarter of a mile. Sheba trudged behind him. She was full of wonder at what he meant to do, but she asked no questions. Some wise instinct was telling her to do exactly as he said.

From the sled he took a shovel and gave it to the young woman. "Dig just this side of the big rock-close to the root of the tree," he told her. Sheba dug, and at the second stroke

of the spade struck something hard. He stooped and pulled out a sack. "Open it," he said. "Rip it with

this knife." She ran the knife along the coarse weave of the cloth. Fifteen or twenty smaller sacks lay exposed. Sheba

looked up at Macdonald, a startled question in her eyes. He nodded. "You guessed it. This is part of the gold for which Robert Milton was murdered."

"But-how did it get here?" "I buried it there yesterday. Come." He led her around the rock. Back of it lay something over which was spread a long bit of canvas. The heart

of Sheba was beating wildly. The Scotsman looked at her from a rock-bound face. "Underneath this canvas is the body of one of the men who murfered Milton. He died more miserably than the man he shot. Half the gold stolen from the bank is in that gunnysack you have just dug up. If you'll tell me who has the other half, I'll tell you who helped him rob

bling

ness. Macdonald drew back the cloth and showed the rough, hard face of a work ingman.

"His name was Trelawney. I kicked

him out of our camps because he was a troublemaker.' "He was one of the men that robbed

you later!" she exclaimed. "Yes. And now he has tried to rob me again and has paid for it with his

life.

Her mind flashed back over the past. "Then his partner in this last crime must have been the same man-what's | change mine for any one that was ever his name?—that was with him last

"Northrup." He nodded slowly. "I in this park covered with snow-if our day. Will that give us time, my dear?

guess is right." "And Gordon-you admit he didn't do it?"

Again he nodded, sulkily. "No. He didn't do it."

Joy lilted in her voice. "So you've brought me here to tell me. Oh, I am with a smile. glad, my friend, that you were so good. And it is like you to do it. You have always been the good friend to me."

The Scotsman smiled, a little wistfully. "You take a mean advantage of riage, would it?" a man. You nurse him when he's illand are kind to him when he is welland try to love him, though he is twice your age and more. Then, when his enemy is in his power, he finds he can't strike him down without striking Thursday?" you too. Take your young man, Sheba come to grips with him again. I'm stand that." not a patient man, and he's tried me sair. They say I'm a good hater, and I derstand it too?" always thought it true. But what's the use of hating a man, when your little smile, spoke what was in her soft arms are round him for an

The fine eyes of the girl were wells brave—and strong. But you're very of warm light. Her gladness was not inquiry. "Of course that's nonsense. willful and set. I don't want to lose for herself and her lover only, but for my friend. I want to know that he is the friend that had been so nearly all I have believed him-n great man lost and was now found. He believed Mrs. Mallory, I think, though he doesn't who stands for the things that are fine he had done it for her, but Sheba was know it yet." sure his reasons lay deeper. He was "Then it is for my sake and not for too much of a man to hide evidence rebound," said Diane bluntly. his that you want me to drop the case and let his rival be falsely accused of murder. It was not in him to do a has always liked her very much. He cheap thing like that. When it came is fond of her for what she is. What can't hurt him. Nobody can really be to the pinch, he was too decent to stab attracted him in me were the things hurt from outside—not unless he is a in the back. But she was willing to

"I'll always be thanking you for your for what you are?" goodness to me," she told him simply. likely not be seeing you again alone, the time he finds out what I am he'll so I'll say it now. Don't waste any have to put up with me."

his ain gait even when he gets a bit

facer." "Yes," she agreed. And in a flash she saw what would happen, that in the reaction from his depression he would turn to Genevieve Mallory and marry her.

"You're too young for me, unyhow too soft and innocent. Once you told me that you couldn't keep step with better than Colby Macdonald would. me. It's true. You can't. It was a daft dream."

He took a deep breath, seemed to shake himself out of it, and smiled cheerfully upon her.

"We'll put our treasure-trove on the sled and go back to your friends," he continued briskly, "Tomorrow I'll send men up to scour the hills for Northrup's bedy."

Sheba drew the canvas back over the face of the dead man. As she followed Macdonald back to the trall, tears filled her eyes. She was remembering that the white, stinging death that had crept upon these men so swiftly had missed her by a hair's breadth. The strong, lusty life had been stricken out of the big Cornishman and probably of his partner in crime. Perhaps they had left mothers or wives or sweethearts to mourn them.

Macdonald relieved Elliot at breaking trail and the young man went back to the gee-pole. They had discarded mukluks and wore moccasins and snowshoes. It was hard, slow work, for the trail-breaker had to fight his way through snow along the best route he could find. The moon was high when at last they reached the roadhouse.

CHAPTER XXIV. で変更

Diane Changes Her Mind. The news of Sheba's safety had been telephoned to Diane from the roadhouse, so that all the family from Peter down were on the porch to welcome her with mingled tears and kisses. Since Gordon had to push on to the hospital to have Holt taken care of, it was Macdonald who brought the girl home. The mine-owner declined rather brusquely an invitation to stay to dinner on the plea that he had busi-

ness at the office which would not wait. Impulsively Sheba held out both her hands to him. "Belleve me, I am thanking you with the whole of my heart, my friend. And I'm praying for you the old Irish blessing, 'God save you kindly."

The deep-set, rapacious eyes of the Scotsman burned into hers for an instant. Without a word he released her hands and turned away.

Her eyes followed him, a vital, dynamic American who would do big, lawless things to the day of his death. She sighed. He had been a great figure in her life, and now he had passed out of it.

As soon as she was alone with Diane, her Irish cousin dropped the little bomb she had up her sleeve.

"I'm going to be married Thursday

Mrs. Paget embraced her for the tenth time within an hour. She was pled piper and-" very fond of Sheba, and she had been That out of her danger had resulted the engagement Diane had hoped for was surplusage of good luck.

"You lucky, sensible girl." Sheba assented demurely. "I do think I'm sensible as well as lucky. It man for her even when he wants her. But I know at last. He's the man for

me out of ten million. "I'm sure of it, dear. Oh, I am so couldn't help it.

"One gets to know a man pretty well on a trip like that. I wouldn't made. I like everything about him, Di.

I am the happiest girl." "I'm so glad you see it that way at hate to believe it, but it is probably last," Diane passed to the practical true. And he, too, is lying somewhere aspect of the situation. "But Thurs-

And who are you going to have here?" "Just the family. I've invited two guests, but neither of them can come, One has a broken leg and the other says he doesn't want to see me married to another man," Sheba explained

"So Gordon won't come." . "Yes. He'll have to be here. We can't get along without the bridegroom. It wouldn't be a legal mar-

Diane looked at her, for the moment dumb. "You little wretch!" she got out at last. "So It's Gordon, is it? Are you quite sure this time? Not likely to change your mind before

"I suppose, to an outsider, I do seem O'Neill, and marry him, and for God's fickle," Miss O'Neill admitted smilingsake, get him out of Alaska before I ly. "But Gordon and I both under-

"And Colby Macdonald-does he un-"Oh, yes," Her smile grew broader,

would quite suit him, after all. Not enough experience for the place." Diane flashed a suspicious look of

"He told me that he didn't think I

What did he tell you?" "Something like that. He will marry

"You mean she will get him on the "That isn't a nice way to put it. He

"And Gordon likes you, I suppose Shebn did not resent the little note

He brushed that aside at once, of friendly surcasm. "I suppose he There's one thing more, lass. I'll has his fancies about me, too, but by

his imagination gave to me."

"What in the world have you be doing with your face?" demanded Di-As an afterthought she added: "Mr. Macdonald is all cut up too."

"We've been taking massage treat-ment," Gordon passed to a subject of more immediate interest. "Do I get my congratulations, Di?"

She kissed him, too, for old sake's sake. "I do believe you'll suit Sheba He's a great man and you are not. But it isn't everybody that is fit to be the wife of a great man."

"That's a double, left-handed compliment," laughed Gordon. "But you can't say apything that will hurt my feelings today, Di. Isn't that your baby I hear crying? What a heartless mother you

Diane gave him the few minutes sione with Sheba that his gay smile had asked for. "Get out with you," she said, laughing. "Go to the top of the hill and look at the lovers' moon I've ordered there expressly for you:



As Lovers Will to the End of Time

and while you are there forget that there are going to be crying bables and nursemalds with evenings out in that golden future of yours."

"Come along, Sheba, We'll start now on the golden trail," said Elliot. She walked as if she loved it. Herlong, slender legs moved rhythmically

and her arms swung true as pendu-The moon was all that Diane had promised. Sheba drank it in happily. "I believe I must be a pagan. I love the sun and the moon and I know it's all true about the little folk and the

"If it's paganism to be in love with on a great strain concerning her safety. the world, you are a thirty-third degree

pagan." "Well, and was there ever a more-

beautiful night before?" He thought not, but he had not the words to tell her that for him its beauty lay largely in her presence. Her isn't every girl that knows the right passionate love of things fine and brave transformed the universe for him. It was enough for him to be near her, to hear the laughter bubbling inher throat, to touch her crisp, blueglad." Diane hugged her again. She black hair as he adjusted the scarf

about her head. "God made the night," he replied. "So that's a Christian thought as well as a pagan one."

They were no exception to the rule that lovers are egoists. The world for them tonight divided itself into two classes. One included Sheba O'Neill and Gordon Elliot; the other took in the uninteresting remnant of humanity. No matter how far afield their talk began, it always came back to themselves. They wanted to know all about each other, to compare experiences and points of view. But time fled toofast for words. They talked-as lovers will to the end of time-in exclamations and the meeting of eyes and lib

tle endearments. When Diana and Peter found them on the hillside, Sheba protested, with her half-shy, half-audacious smile, that It could not be two hours since she and Gordon had left the living room. Peter grinned. He remembered a hilltop consecrated to his own courtship of Dlane.

The only wedding present that Macdonald sent Sheba was a long envelope with two documents attached by a clip. One was from the Kusiak Sun. It announced that the search party had found the body of Northrup with the rest of the stolen gold beside him. The other was a copy of a legal document Its effect was that the district attorney had dismissed all charges pending against Gordon Elllot.

Although Macdonald lost the coal claims at Kamatlah by reason of the report of Elliot, all Alaska still believes that he was right. In that country of strong men he stands head and shoulders above his fellows. He has the fortunate gift of commanding the admiration of friend and foe alike. The lady who is his wife is secretly the greatest of his slaves, but she tries not to let him know how much he has captured her imagination. For Genevieve Macdonald cannot quite understand, herself, how so elemental an emotion as love can have plerced the armor of

her sophistication. [THE END.]

Smallest Drinking Cup. One of the new folding drinking cups made of waterproof fabric collapses into a tube no larger than a land per-